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ABSTRACT

A project explored and addressed the communication barriers to union participation of stewards and members of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). A questionnaire was developed and distributed to over 300 ACTWU members; 153 responded. Other commitments and communication skills were identified as key barriers to greater participation in the union. The English program courses were held at a plant that experienced a temporary layoff and at two side-by-side plants. Almost all members who signed up were speakers of English as a second language. Thirty-five needs assessment interviews were completed for the two courses; 28 participants were selected. With the exception of one Portuguese speaker, all learners were either Chinese or Vietnamese. A 35-hour communication skills course had 7 participants. The project showed that members demonstrated an interest in two alternative basic skills delivery models: an intensive day course for temporarily laid-off members and a course after work 2 days per week for employed members. Twenty-five members improved their basic English skills in three areas: participating in their union, performing their jobs, and everyday life. The project showed that unions have an essential role in helping their members access learner-centered communication skills training. (Appendixes include preliminary networking and research, questionnaire with response totals, and questionnaire respondents by first language group.) (YLB)

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WORKPLACE EDUCATION MANITOBA

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS TO UNION PARTICIPATION

LOCAL 459
AMALGAMATED CLOTHING AND TEXTILE WORKERS UNION

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BY
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UNION BASIC SKILLS CONSULTANT

OCTOBER, 1994

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WEMSC would also like to thank the Manitoba Government for providing coordination for this project through the Manitoba Literacy and Continuing Education Branch, Department of Education and Training.

Graham Dowdell co-ordinated "Communication Barriers to Union Participation". He is currently the Co-ordinator of the Labour Basic Skills Project of the Manitoba Federation of Labour. He has been an Instructor, Outreach Co-ordinator and Teacher Trainer for English at the Workplace, a program of the Metro Labour Education Centre in Toronto. He has also been an Instructor with the Workplace Language Training program of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. If you have any questions about "Communication Barriers to Union Participation", Graham can be reached at 947-1400.

ACTWU LOCAL 459
COMMUNICATION BARRIERS TO UNION PARTICIPATION PROJECT

1. BACKGROUND

The Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) Local 459, with approximately 1,500 members, is the largest union of garment workers in Manitoba. In addition to this base in the Winnipeg garment industry, ACTWU 459 also has members in the garment and laundry industries in Portage, Brandon and Thunder Bay. The membership of ACTWU 459 is very diverse, both ethnically and linguistically. Union staff estimate that there are at least 24 different language groups represented within the membership, 90% of whom are women sewing machine operators.

There were several important reasons why ACTWU 459 approached the Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC) for assistance in developing a project to explore and address the communication skills barriers to union participation.

1. There was a desire to get the union stewards on the shop floor more directly involved in responding to the immediate concerns of the members. Previously, all concerns had been handled by the central union office. It was felt that more immediate steward interventions would be more effective and still allow for central office input as needed.

2. Greater Steward involvement in problem-solving could also result in an increased steward awareness and participation in contract negotiations.

3. Improved English language skills were needed by the membership to participate more actively and critically, both in the workplace and within the union.

4. Management in ACTWU-organized plants, as elsewhere in the Winnipeg garment industry, had been reluctant to co-sponsor joint union-management workplace basic skills programs that have been established in many Canadian industries in recent years. The ACTWU 459 leadership believed that if the union could successfully demonstrate the viability of such programs, then management might be more co-operative in the future.

For all of the above reasons, ACTWU decided to proceed on its own to assess the communication skills needs of its stewards and members, and to develop a union-based training response. In March, 1993, ACTWU received funding approval from WEMSC for a new project: Communication Barriers to Union Participation. Graham Dowdell, a Workplace Basic Skills Instructor with experience working in and with the Labour movement, was hired as a consultant to co-ordinate the project.

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2. PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) consisted of the following people:

Sue Turner, Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee Chair
Greg Maruca, Manager, ACTWU Local 459
Mike Radchenka, Business Agent, ACTWU Local 459
Florence Marquez, President
Dallas Schweder, Treasurer/Recording Secretary
Tiena Warkentin, Joint Council Rep
Fun Sung Ly, Joint Council Rep
Graham Dowdell, Project Co-ordinator, Labour Education Consultant

3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the project, as developed in Phase One of the project, were:

1. To determine the literacy task requirements of Shop Steward and Joint Council representative positions.

2. To determine the literacy levels of those individuals currently holding such positions within the union, as well as the membership at large.

3. To determine the extent to which literacy requirements are a barrier to members seeking positions within the union and to full participation in those positions.

4. To develop a basic skills training infrastructure, including a model and curriculum material, to bridge this literacy skill gap on the part of both current and potential union stewards and executive.

5. To develop a Clear Language Companion Collective Agreement which can be printed by the union in conjunction with the formal legal agreement with the employers.

4. PRELIMINARY NETWORKING AND RESEARCH

A number of individuals and organizations were contacted and they provided some important insights and materials for the project. (See Appendix 1).

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5. QUESTIONNAIRE: BARRIERS TO UNION PARTICIPATION

METHODOLOGY

The first major step in the project was the design of a questionnaire which asked the membership to identify barriers which limited their own personal participation in the union. A 1986 questionnaire developed by the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto in association with Humber College (Developing Solidarity with Immigrant Members) provided an initial model. A broad definition of "participation" was adopted which included:

* speaking to co-workers about union or workplace issues
* reading the contract or other union information
* taking a complaint to the union
* participating in contract ratification votes
* voting or running in union elections
* attending union social activities
* attending union meetings

The barriers to participation that the PSC decided to focus on included:

* fear of the employer
* family and other commitments
* lack of interest
* lack of understanding of the union and union meetings
* a sense that their participation would not change anything
* insufficient literacy skills

A number of drafts of the questionnaire were reviewed by the PSC and the final draft was then pilot tested by a group of six members from the most predominant language groups. After minor amendments the questionnaire was then translated into Chinese, Vietnamese, Laotian, Punjabi, Portuguese, and Italian using the International Centre's Language Bank. The translations were then checked by members of these language groups. The Punjabi questionnaire was redrafted after this checking. The questionnaires were anonymous: members were specifically requested to not write down their names.

Over 300 questionnaires were distributed. Each ACTWU plant received a specific package of questionnaires based on the number of members and language groups. Stewards and Joint Council representatives played an important role in speaking with members, as well as distributing and collecting questionnaires. Draw prizes of a clock radio and a $50.00 dinner gift certificate were helpful in encouraging responses. One English member, who had difficulty reading and writing, offered to do the questionnaire orally. It was also apparent that a number of members required the assistance of family members to complete the questionnaire.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

There were 153 responses - over 10% of ACTWU's membership. It became clear the family commitments and communication skills were key barriers to greater participation in the union. See Appendix 2 for the English version of the questionnaire with response totals for all questions. See Appendix 3 for the response rates by mother tongue. The following are some highlights of the questionnaire results:

* Over half of the respondents (78) didn't understand their contract very well, not at all or had no idea how well they understood it.

* 98 respondents did not vote in the last contract ratification.

* Reasons for not voting included:
  - too busy (29)
  - unable to read contract information (27)
  - unable to discuss contract in English with co-workers (22)
  - felt their vote would not change anything (16)

* The Shop Steward was seen as the main source of contract information (52), followed by co-workers (44), and reading the contract itself (36).

* 52 respondents indicated that re-writing the contract in clearerEnglish would help them significantly to understand it. A further 45 indicated that it would help a little.

* 100 respondents indicated that translating a clear-languagecontract would help them significantly to understand it.

* 56 respondents indicated that they when they don't read union notices or information it is because reading English is not easy.

* 64 respondents indicated that they rarely or never discuss union or workplace issues with their co-workers.

* 50 respondents indicated that this was because speaking English is not easy while 36 indicated a problem understanding English.

* 98 respondents indicated that they never attend union social activities.

* The main reasons for not attending union social activities included:
  - too busy with family (61)
  - too busy with other things (35)
  - difficulty speaking English (33)
  - difficulty understanding English (29)
  - difficulty reading notices in English (29)

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* Reasons for <u>not</u> filing any grievance included:
  - unable to explain problem in English (44)
  - didn't understand rights under contract (32)
  - didn't want to fight with supervisor (32)
  - didn't think the union could help (29)

* 100 respondents did not vote in the last union election.

* 40 respondents were too busy, 28 didn't understand enough about the union, 28 couldn't read the candidate information, and 24 reported that they didn't know where or when the vote was.

* Only 5 respondents had ever run for a union office.

* Reasons for <u>not</u> running included: too busy with family or other things (64), lack of interest (33), difficulties speaking (37), understanding (37), writing (32) and reading (31) English.

* 79 respondents indicated that they never went to union meetings. A further 27 go only rarely. Only 16 went quite often.

* The main reasons for not attending union meetings included family or other responsibilities (78), difficulties speaking English (39), understanding English (37), and reading notices and meeting information (27)

* Members expressed an interest in training in "Speaking and Understanding English" (44), "Reading and Writing English" (33)"How the union works" (31), and "Health and Safety" (25).

SOME FINAL COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS (TRANSLATED)

"I am very much interested in the union, but the English language is my problem and the reason why I cannot attend the meetings."

"My mom cannot understand any English so she cannot know how the union is going. She also has problems with her work."

"It is very hard for me to understand English, especially conversations, reading and writing. It causes inconveniences in my workplace. Sometimes I do not quite understand my supervisor's directions. English classes would help me improve my English, to attend the union meetings and help me with my work."

"I don't know English and I have no time because I have to look after my family. It would be useful if the constitution and services of the union, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the members could be translated. Workers only know that they have to pay monthly membership fees, not about their rights and responsibilities. Therefore, the union can't really protect them."

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6. MEMBERSHIP CLASSES - THE ACTWU ENGLISH PROGRAM

DEFINING THE SCOPE

The survey confirmed that a significant number of the ACTWU members considered English literacy and speaking skills to be a barrier to union participation. Based on this, the PSC decided that a training course for the membership should be a top priority. This represented somewhat of a shift from the original project objectives which focused primarily on the Joint Council/Steward level of the union. Initially, the PSC considered doing course promotion and sign-up at all ACTWU plants so that all members would know about the program and have an equal, although limited, opportunity to participate. However, even after WEMSC agreed to fund a second class, it was decided take a more targetted approach to outreach. This was based on a realistic assessment of project timelines and resources, as well as out of a concern that wide-scale promotion would raise membership expectations far higher than the pilot courses could ever hope to meet, resulting in a lot of angry members. It was agreed that if classes could be organized in the future, plants other than those used in the pilot project would be selected.

Circumstances influenced the choice of which plants to target. One of ACTWU's plants, Girl's World/Axcell Fashions, announced a temporary layoff from late February to early April. This provided an excellent opportunity to test a delivery model where learners would come for longer sessions over a shorter number of weeks. The major stumbling block appeared to be whether the Unemployment Insurance Commission would consider the members who took the course unavailable for work and thus, ineligible to collect UI. The second target selected was the two side-by-side plants Gemini Fashions and Peerless Garments which had a combined membership of over four hundred.

COURSE PROMOTION AND SIGN-UP

Girl's World/Axcell Fashions

Discussions with Mr. John Williamson of Insurance Services, Human Resources Development Canada, clarified that because the course was short term and participants would return to work if called back, there was no conflict with UI eligibility. ACTWU Manager Greg Maruca agreed to provide the Commission with a letter outlining the program and listing the participants. Promotion and sign-up then proceeded, carried out primarily by Fun Sung Ly, PSC member and plant steward. Her ability to discuss the course with the predominantly Chinese and Vietnamese members in their first languages was important. Twelve members signed up.

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Gemini Fashions/Peerless Garments

Management agreed to let the union give information sessions in the Gemini lunch room and on the shop floor at Peerless. Gemini management expressed an interest in the results of the sign-up and hinted at the possibility of greater co-operation. There was a brief oral presentation in English, key points were highlighted on a flip chart and a short English notice was distributed. In addition, Chinese, Vietnamese and Portuguese interpreters circulated to offer clarifications and sign-up those interested. Sign-up sheets were also left with Steering Committee reps Dallas Schweder and Florence Marquez to allow members to discuss the course with their families before making a decision. Over the next week, more than seventy members signed up from the two plants.

Class location was the main question raised by members during the information sessions. It became apparent that interest was higher if the class could be held at the workplace right after work. The PSC's preference, however, was to have the class at the central union office so that the members would become familiar with the location and staff. The issue was ultimately settled by Gemini management's refusal to allow the use of the lunchroom after work.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Although the courses were promoted as open to both native and non-native speakers of English, almost all of the members who signed up for the courses were ESL speakers. While this was in fact reflective of the linguistic make-up of the membership, there may also have been a perception amongst native speakers that their reading and writing needs were not as important as ESL listening and speaking. Although reaching out to native-speakers with literacy needs is always challenging, there may be unique barriers directly related to having only small pockets of native-speakers amongst a predominantly ESL population.

Ms. Yu Ping Liang (M. ED.), an ESL instructor in the Fashion Industry Sewing School at Western Glove, was hired to do the needs assessment interviews and course delivery with the members from Girl's World/Axcell Fashions. Project Co-ordinator Graham Dowdell handled the needs assessments and delivery for the Peerless/Gemini class. Ms. Liang and Mr. Joseph Nguyen of the Vietnamese Non-profit Housing Association provided interpreter support when needed for very basic level speakers. Some members also brought relatives along to help.

A needs assessment form was developed based on the form used in the Workplace Language Training (WLT) program of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. However, it proved too cumbersome in actual use and was then abbreviated. Two picture sheets were used to help identify the language situations that learners desired to focus on. The first one is used in community-based ESL programs of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship and focuses on community situations such as transportation, calling the hospital and shopping. A second picture sheet was developed which focused on workplace and union topics such as talking with the supervisor, paycheque problems, health and safety and the collective agreement.

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A total of 35 needs assessment interviews were completed for the two courses. Due to limited space in the two classes, the PSC agreed to prioritize those members with the lowest level skills. Those considered too high were contacted by telephone and told why they could not be accepted in the pilot courses. Thirteen participants were selected for the Girl's World/Axcell Fashions class, and 15 for the Peerless/Gemini class. With the exception of one Portuguese speaker, all learners were either Chinese or Vietnamese. The language levels ranged from basic to intermediate, with listening and speaking skills the primary learning priorities. To better meet the needs of the Portuguese speaker - who was at a very basic level - the PSC agreed to hire another Portuguese member as a Teacher Aide. Even with this additional support, the member ultimately decided not to take the course, citing family responsibilities. Although our efforts here were unsuccessful, they do illustrate the extra efforts that are required to attract very basic level, non-confident learners into training programs.

The needs assessment interviews revealed that the members were interested in improving their language skills in all three of the environments they were asked about:

* Situations related to their job and workplace
* Situations related to their union
* Situations related to everyday tasks in the community

COURSE DELIVERY

The Girl's World/Axcell Fashions course was held at the ACTWU office on Thursdays and Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Participants found child care easier to arrange for two days rather than having shorter sessions spread out over more days. From Februrary 24 to April 8, 1994 a total of 60 class hours were completed. Eleven of thirteen original participants completed the course. By mid-April, all participants had been recalled to work.

The Peerless/Gemini class was held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the ACTWU office from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. from March 29 to June 28, 1994. Total class hours was 54. Participants car pooled as much as possible and the union covered parking costs. Twelve of the original thirteen participants completed the course - six from each plant. Both classes wrapped up with completion ceremonies in which participants received certificates, class and individual photos were taken and a lunch was provided by ACTWU.

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COURSE EVALUATIONS

METHODOLOGY

Both instructors drafted separate class evaluation forms based on the topics covered and learning activities utilized. Each form questioned students on the following:

* general classroom conditions
* participant progress in various language situations
* learning activities used in class
* instructor evaluation

Ms. Liang translated both forms into Chinese. Vietnamese-speakers were able to read the Chinese version. Ms. Liang also provided translation from Chinese to English on the completed forms, and assisted in the evaluations for the Peerless/Gemini class. Girl's World/Axcell Fashions evaluations were completed by participants at home and mailed to the ACTWU office.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

GIRL'S WORLD/AXCELL FASHIONS

There was general agreement that learning English at the union office while on temporary lay off was very convenient. Most participants were also in favour of having the union speak to management about holding classes at the workplace. Almost all participants felt that the class was too short. Most participants felt that they made "a lot" of progress in the various language situations covered in the course and were also supportive of the learning activities used. Most participants rated the instructor as excellent. Participants also remarked on the instructor's patience, good explanations and presentations. The use of real objects for the purposes of learning vocabulary was also commended. The feelings of one participant translated this way:

> "I hope that there will be more English classes like this one so that we can contribute to Canada. I would love to attend English classes after we are called back to work."

GEMINI FASHIONS/PEERLESS GARMENTS

There was general agreement that learning English at the union office after work was convenient. All participants agreed that the union should talk to management about holding classes at the workplace with release time for training. Most participants felt that the course was too short, although some felt that the length was just right. Participants reported that they were now more confident in their English, wanted to learn more, and felt more supportive of the union. Most participants felt that they had made good progress in the various content areas and that the learning activities were helpful. The teacher was generally rated excellent and participants commented on his patience and clear explanations.

A binder containing all learning materials, needs assessment and class evaluation forms from the two membership classes has been assembled for future instructors and is available at the ACTWU office.

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GIRL'S WORLD/AXCELL FASHIONS CLASS

From left to right,
Front row: Mi Tuyet Ly, Nhan Tran, Qi Yun Yang
Middle row: Trinh Ngoc Tran, Anh Tuyet Tran, Yong Siu Lim, Tam Luu, Ying Wah Wong, Yuping Liang, (Teacher).
Back Row: Graham Dowdell (Project Co-ordinator), Greg Maruca (ACTWU 459 Manager)
Absent: Bup Thi Nguyen, May Wu.

PEERLESS GARMENTS/GEMINI FASHIONS CLASS

Left to right: Graham Dowdell (Instructor), Cui Hua Li, Nguyen Thi Danh, Mei Liang, Tam Hue Trau, Woon Lui, Xau Xieu Hoanh, Hui Ling Ma, Fung Ng, Hsing Wan Hung, Chun Fung Szeto, Ai Hsiung, Linda Lu.

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7. COMMUNICATION SKILLS COURSE

BACKGROUND

In ACTWU Local 459 there is a minimum of one union steward in each plant. In many cases, the steward also fills the position of plant representative to the Joint Council (executive). As noted earlier, the long-standing tradition in the union has been for the stewards to refer all major complaints from the shop floor to the central office staff. At contract negotiations, a lack of day-to-day experience solving shop floor problems, often left the stewards unprepared and unwilling to take an active role in shaping union demands and strategies. With a change in union management several years ago, this practice began to be viewed as an overly-centralized, inefficient way to process member concerns. It was also seen as a waste of the experience, skills and dedication of the stewards. The problem was also part of a larger challenge to increase the participation and activism of all levels of the organization - from the membership up.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DEFINING JOB DUTIES AND LITERACY TASKS

ACTWU 459 is now in transition. Although there is a firm desire to see greater participation by the stewards, to date there has been a lack of definition to this new role, with little in the way of specifics down on paper or motions passed in meetings. This has made the process of assessing basic skills needs extremely difficult. It is common to do an analysis of the literacy tasks associated with the key components of a job, assess the levels of participants' skills related to these tasks, and then proceed to design training that seeks to close the skill gaps that exist. In this case, the PSC had to start by actually deciding on the key job components, those job duties that stewards and Joint Council representatives would be expected to carry out in their new roles.

The first step was to research available union materials such as The Steward Handbook (CLC, 1990), Steward's Handbook (Public Service Alliance of Canada, 1983), Reference Manual for ACTWU Stewards. Training materials from numerous steward courses put on by ACTWU, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) were also examined, as well as the ACTWU Constitution and Bylaws. Based on this research, job duties for stewards and Joint Council representatives were drafted. These were then reviewed by the PSC and final amendments were made. The next step was to break these main job duties down into their component literacy or communication tasks. Once again, a draft was prepared and then finalized in discussions with the PSC.

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JOINT COUNCIL RETREAT WORKSHOP

While the above work was proceeding, the PSC also decided that it would be beneficial to set aside some time at the union's annual executive retreat to discuss the project with the new Joint Council and begin to get them involved in shaping the training program. In an afternoon workshop on Saturday, Nov. 20, the overall project and final draft of the membership questionnaire on participation barriers were reviewed. Participants were then broken into small groups to consider their own involvement with the union and to identify barriers to greater member participation. They were also asked to discuss what communication skills they would like to see included in a training program, and to identify important union, workplace and everyday situations where these skills were required.

Participants noted that many members do not have enough information about the union and that there were definite language barriers between the members and their Joint Council reps and stewards. Speaking, writing, and listening were self-identified as key communication skills needing improvement. The workplace and union were the most needy topic areas, including health and safety, being an effective steward/Joint Council rep, dealing with supervisors, and union meetings. Saturday mornings were the preferred time for holding courses and forty hours was seen as a realistic length. A brief summary of the workshop findings was distributed to all stewards and Joint Council reps on Dec. 1993.

FOCUS GROUP NEEDS ASSESSMENT DISCUSSION

On Jan. 11, 1994 a follow up letter was sent to all ACTWU stewards and Joint Council representatives formally inviting them to participate in the communication skills course. Ten individuals expressed an interest. On April 4, 1994 a Focus Group Needs Assessment discussion took place involving six of the potential participants. This time delay was largely due to the PSC's decision to prioritize the membership courses. Prior to the Focus Group, the ACTWU manager and business agent were asked to review the questions and add topics for consideration of the participants. In the focus group, participants were asked to identify their own personal learning priorities for communication skills and situations. The results would be used to draft a course outline which course participants could then amend in the first session.

COURSE DELIVERY

The Communication Skills course began on Saturday, April 23 at the ACTWU office. Six participants started and finished the course and an additional participant joined half way through. The course was delivered by Project Co-ordinator Graham Dowdell. Two sessions were combined in a weekend retreat on May 27-29. Another session was held on Wednesday, June 8 for scheduling reasons. The course finished on Saturday, June 11 with participants receiving certificates and celebrating with a pot luck lunch. In total, the course ran for 35 hours, somewhat shorter than planned due to increasing family commitments of participants as summer approached.

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Course topics included:

- Effective speaking at union meetings
- Persuading members to attend union meetings
- Actively listening skills
- Listening to member complaints and recording information
- Helping members calculate their benefits and pensions
- Critical thinking and problem solving

COURSE EVALUATIONS

In addition to evaluations at the end of each session, a course evaluation form was mailed out to all participants after the course. Participants responded that the course met their needs very well and that it would be very helpful to them in their everyday work as a steward or Joint Council rep. It was suggested that a more optimum time for the course would be winter, when things were less hectic in the factories and the weather wasn't as nice. This would also allow for the course to be longer as well. The materials and videos used throughout the course were also seen as very helpful. Participants viewed the instructor as well prepared, knowledgeable, and encouraging of learner participation in all course decisions and activities. Course content and activities were also judged to be very helpful. One participant summed up her feelings about the course this way:

> This course is very helpful for a shop steward like myself. I would like to have more courses like this in the future - and for our members too!

For all course materials, as well as needs assessment and evaluation forms, see ACTWU 459 Communication Skills Course.

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COMMUNICATION SKILLS COURSE
ACTWU LOCAL 459 STEWARDS/JOINT COUNCIL REPS

From left to right: Dallas Schweder (Peerless), Charito Gamble (MWG), Chit Alvarez (MWG), Florence Marquez (Gemini), Tiena Warkentin (Canadian Sportswear), Fun Sung Ly (Girl's World/Axcell Fashions), Florentina Paredes (MWG), Graham Dowdell (Instructor).

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8. CLEAR LANGUAGE COMPANION COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE EDUCATIONAL

On May 5, 1993 the project Steering Committee viewed and discussed the Frontier College video The Clear Writer's Hit Squad. The video entertainingly reviews ten important guidelines for clear writing.

SETTING THE FORMAT

During initial discussions on format for the Clear Language Companion Collective Agreement, the PSC decided that administrative clauses describing the relationship between the employer and the union did not need to be included. It was also agreed that interspersing the clear language text with photos of members and appropriate graphics would make the final document warmer and more user-friendly. It was also decided to include a table with essential information about the benefit plan in an abbreviated form.

DRAFTING OF COMPANION AGREEMENT

The actual drafting process began with two drafts being done - one by ACTWU Manager Greg Maruca, and one by Project Co-ordinator Graham Dowdell. Once these were completed, the Steering Committee then met on several occasions to compare the two drafts and create a final, composite draft. This process took longer than expected because the work had to fit in around other aspects of the project that had more rigid timelines, such as the questionnaire to the membership and course set-up. With the final draft now completed, the union will be responsible for final production of the booklet.

CLEAR LANGUAGE HEALTH, WELFARE AND PENSION FUND

A clear language version of the Health, Welfare and Pension Fund between ACTWU 459 and the Garment Manufacturers has also been drafted. Although not one of the original project objectives, this was drafted as part of a reading and problem-solving exercise in the Communication Skills Course. The union now has the option of producing this in revised booklet form as well.

9. IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SOME IMPORTANT PROJECT IMPACTS ON ACTWU LOCAL 459

1. Members have demonstrated their interest and commitment to two alternative basic skills delivery models: an intensive day course for temporarily laid-off members and a course after work two days a week for employed members. In both cases, it has also been demonstrated that situating courses at the ACTWU office does not appear to create a significant barrier to participation.

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2. Twenty-five members have improved their basic English skills in three areas: participating in their union, performing their jobs, and everyday life.

3. Twenty-five members have increased their familiarity with the union office and staff, have a much better sense of what the union does for them, and report that they are now more supportive of it.

4. Twenty-five members have a better understanding of their Health and Welfare Benefit Plan. During the course, this increased knowledge resulted in participants applying for and receiving over $600.00 in benefits which they previously did not know they had a right to.

5. wenty-five members are now able and willing to articulate to other members on the shop floor positive information about the union services and the benefit plan.

6. even Union stewards have improved both their understanding of the main tasks required of them and improved their basic skills required to complete these tasks on an everyday basis.

7. CTWU 459, now has a training course materials specific to its local needs which can be delivered to Stewards, Joint Council representatives, and members from the shop floor as needed.

8. CTWU staff and Project Steering Committee members have a practical, working knowledge of all aspects of program planning and delivery, in particular, outreach and sign-up, needs assessment, course delivery and evaluation.

9. CTWU has improved its ability to provide translated information for its membership through the use of community translation services.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACTWU LOCAL 459

1. hat ACTWU Local 459 annually target at least one plant for an 80-hour, union-based basic skills course for members. The course should take place at the ACTWU office.

2. hat in the promotion and sign-up for such courses, the union make special efforts to reach out to native-speakers with literacy needs.

3. hat ACTWU Local 459 approach management at Gemini Fashions, Peerless Garments, and Girl's World/Axcell Fashions to share with them the results of this project and solicit their support for joint workplace basic skills programs.

4. That ACTWU Local 459 offer the Communications Skills for Shop Stewards course to new stewards and executive members whenever turnover in these positions warrants it.

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5. That ACTWU Local 459 share the results of this project with other trade unions in Manitoba, as well as with ACTWU's national and international offices.

6. That ACTWU Local 459 establish and maintain an office Basic Skills Resource Library containing program information for interested members and executive, as well as the curriculum materials created by this project for use by future program instructors.

7. That ACTWU Local 459 prominently display photos of all basic skills classes both to recognize the commitment of past participants, and to demonstrate and promote the union's commitment to basic skills programming for its membership.

8. That ACTWU Local 459 consider organizing a Multicultural Fair - an evening of events, displays and food which showcases and demonstrates union support for the diverse cultures of its membership.

9. That ACTWU Local 459 produce the draft of the Plain Language Contract in booklet form with complimentary photos and graphics.

10. That ACWTU Local 459 consider the feasibility of translating the Plain English Contract into predominant membership languages.

11. That ACTWU Local 459 consider producing a plain language version of the Health, Welfare, and Pension Plan based on the completed draft.

12. That ACWTU Local 459 critically examine its on-going communication with the membership, particularly in terms of increasing the use of Plain English or translation.

10. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The Communication Barriers to Union Participation Project has been a tremendous awareness-raising and learning experience for everyone involved - course participants, questionnaire respondents, Project Steering Committee members, and the Project Co-ordinator. The Project has demonstrated that English communication skills are often a significant barrier to union participation. The membership of ACTWU Local 459 - particularly those members who participated in the pilot courses - have also demonstrated a strong desire and commitment to improve their communication skills. They have also shown that they prefer basic skills programming that responds to all of their communication needs - as workers, as union members, and as citizens in the community.

The Project has shown that unions have an essential role to play in helping their members access learner-centred communication skills training. In situations where management is reluctant to co-sponsor workplace programs, this union role is even more critical. For those unions who are prepared to take up this challenge, the benefits in terms of greater membership participation and a stronger, more effective union, are well worth the effort.

APPENDIX 1

PRELIMINARY NETWORKING AND RESEARCH

PRELIMINARY NETWORKING AND RESEARCH

Winnipeg
Resource Library, Manitoba Labour Education Centre
Teacher Resource Library, Workplace Language Training, Manitoba, Culture, Heritage, and Citizenship.
Teacher Resource Library, Literacy and Continuing Education Manitoba

Toronto
David St. Louis, then ACTWU Canadian Education Director
Olga Reis, Teacher Trainer, and Gail Carrozzino, Curriculum Developer, Metro Labour Education Centre
Jean Connon Unda, Training Officer, Basic Education and SkillsTraining (BEST), Ontario Federation of Labour

Vancouver
Ed Lavalle, Co-ordinator, Labour Studies Programme, CapilanoCollege

Saskatchewan
Ron Torgerson, Program Co-ordinator, Worker's Education for Skills Training (WEST), Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

New Brunswick
Ethel Sweeney, Literacy Representative, Effective Adult Skills Training (EAST) Canadian Labour Congress, Atlantic Region

New York
Nick Unger, Director, ACTWU Worker Education Program, NY State
Maureen Lamar, Worker Family Education Program, International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU)
Paula Finn, Education Director, ACTWU Local 1199
Debbie Buxton, Director of Staff Development, Worker EducationConsortium
Barbara Kairson, Associate Administrator, Workplace Literacy Program, Association of Federal, State, County, Municipal Workers (AFSCME) District Council 37

Massachusetts
Pam Drouin, New Bedford Worker Education Program

APPENDIX 2

BARRIERS TO UNION PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE

ENGLISH VERSION WITH RESPONSE TOTALS

AMALGAMATED CLOTHING AND TEXTILE WORKERS UNION, LOCAL 459

UNION PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE

PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What is your sex? 128 (a) Female 20 (b) Male

2. What is your present age?

(a)	2	under 20 years	(f)	34	41 to 45 years
(b)	4	21 to 25 years	(g)	18	46 to 50 years
(c)	20	26 to 30 years	(h)	17	51 to 55 years
(d)	18	31 to 35 years	(i)	8	56 to 60 years
(e)	26	36 to 40 years	(j)	2	61 years and over

3. What is the highest level of education you obtained in school? (Please indicate country.)

34 (a) Completed elementary school
26 (b) Some high school
37 (c) Completed high school or equivalent
10 (d) Some college
2 (e) Completed a college or university program

4. What is your mother tongue*? See Appendix 3
(First language learned, often used at home)

5. Have you taken any English upgrading classes? If so, where and when? 40

6. What is your family situation?

27 (a) Single, no children/other family members
17 (b) Single, with children or other family members
15 (c) Married, no children/other family members
41 (d) Married, with children or other family members

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UNDERSTANDING AND VOTING ON YOUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

7. How well do you think you understand your collective agreement? (Check one)

12 (a) Very well
60 (b) Well enough
41 (c) Not very well
18 (d) Not at all
20 (e) I don't know

8. Did you vote in the ratification of your recent contract?

39 (a) Yes (go to Question #10) 98 (b) No

9. If you did **not** vote, why not? (You can check more than one)

6 (a) I wasn't interested
0 (b) I was afraid of the employer finding out
17 (c) I didn't think my vote would change anything
24 (d) I was too busy
27 (e) I couldn't read the contract information
22 (f) I couldn't discuss the contract information with my co-workers in English
18 (g) I didn't understand what the vote was about
18 (h) I didn't know how to vote (where, when, etc.)
____ (i) Other (please indicate) Not here yet, on holidays, family responsibilities, had just started here

10. Where do you get your information about the contract? (You can check more than one)

36 (a) I read the contract
52 (b) My shop steward
14 (c) At union meetings
44 (d) Co-workers
9 (e) My supervisor/management
8 (f) My union office
____ (g) Other (please indicate)_____

11. If the collective agreement was re-written in clearer English, how much would this help you to understand it?

52 (a) A lot
45 (b) A little
19 (c) Not very much
9 (d) Not at all
17 (e) I don't know

...3

12. If this clearer collective agreement was translated into your mother tongue, how much would this help you to understand it?

100 (a) A lot
11 (b) A little
4 (c) Not very much
14 (d) Not at all
7 (e) I don't know

READING UNION NOTICES AND INFORMATION

13. How often do you read union notices and information?

33 (a) Always
30 (b) Most of the time
54 (c) Sometimes
36 (d) Never

14. Why would you **not** read union notices and information? (You can check more than one)

11 (a) I'm not interested
1 (b) I'm afraid my employer will find out
24 (c) I don't think that it will change anything
56 (d) Reading English is not easy
37 (e) The materials are not translated into my mother tongue
20 (f) I don't understand how the union and union meetings work
2 (g) Other (please indicate) Too busy

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DISCUSSING WORKPLACE ISSUES

15. How often do you discuss union or workplace issues with co-workers?

21 (a) Quite often
67 (b) Occasionally
43 (c) Rarely
21 (d) Never

16. Why would you **not** discuss union or workplace issues with co-workers? (You can check more than one)

13 (a) I'm not interested
39 (b) I don't think that it will change anything
5 (c) I'm afraid of my employer finding out
52 (d) Speaking in English is not easy
31 (e) Understanding English is not easy
____ (f) Other (please indicate) Too busy, other workers don't speak English

ATTENDING UNION SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

17. How often do you attend social activities put on by the union? (For example, Open Houses, bowling league, etc.)

6 (a) Most of the time
31 (b) Sometimes
98 (c) Never
15 (d) I don't know

18. Why would you **not** attend social activities put on by the union? (You can check more than one)

24 (a) I'm not interested
1 (b) I'm afraid of my employer finding out
17 (c) I'm too tired
61 (d) I'm too busy looking after my family
35 (e) I'm too busy with other things
21 (f) I don't have transportation
6 (g) I have trouble finding parking at the union office
33 (h) Speaking English is not easy
24 (i) Understanding English is not easy
29 (j) Reading notices in English is not easy
____ (k) Other (Please indicate) Unaware they were happening, unfamiliar with union office location

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WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM

19. When you have a problem or a greivance, who do you usually speak to **first** about it?

28 (a) I usually keep quiet about it
34 (b) A co-worker
32 (c) A family member or friend
38 (d) My shop steward
18 (e) My supervisor
9 (f) My union office
___ (g) Other (please indicate) Manager, front office

20. If you have ever decided **not** to file a grievance or make a complaint to the union, which of the following were important? (You can check more than one)

32 (a) I didn't understand my rights under the contract
36 (b) I didn't want to fight with my supervisor
44 (c) I couldn't explain my problem in English
1 (d) My shop steward couldn't understand English
30 (e) I didn't think the union could help me
8 (f) I thought that I was wrong
___ (g) Other (please indicate) No need to

UNION ELECTIONS

21. Did you vote in the last union election of officers?

36 (a) Yes (Go to Question 23) 100 (b) No

22. If you did **not** vote, why not? (You can check more than one)

10 (a) I wasn't interested
0 (b) I was afraid my employer would find out
12 (c) I didn't think my vote would change anything
40 (d) I was too busy
28 (e) I couldn't read the candidate information
12 (f) I couldn't talk about the candidates with my co-workers
28 (g) I didn't understand enough about the union
24 (h) I didn't know where or when the vote was
3 (i) I didn't think any of the candidates were any good
___ (j) Other (please indicate) On holidays, not work. my at the time, had just started here

...6

23. Have you ever run for election as a union officer?

5 (a) Yes (Go to Question #25) 133 (b) No

24. If not, why not? (You can check more than one)

33 (a) I wasn't interested
12 (b) I was too tired
0 (c) I'm afraid of my employer finding out
39 (d) I am too busy looking after my family
25 (e) I am too busy with other things
16 (f) I didn't think that I could change anything
19 (g) I don't understand enough about workplace issues
22 (h) I don't understand enough about the union
31 (i) Understanding English is hard
37 (j) Speaking English is hard
32 (k) Writing English is hard
31 (l) Reading English is hard
____ (m) Other (please indicate) Had just started here, I'm not up to it

GOING TO UNION MEETINGS

25. How often do you go to union meetings?

16 (a) Quite often
27 (b) Occasionally
27 (c) Rarely
79 (d) Never

26. How do you usually find out that there is going to be a union meeting?

75 (a) Written notice on bulletin board
34 (b) Told by co-worker
38 (b) Told by shop steward
____ (d) Other (Please indicate) _____

27. How satisfied are you with how you find out about union meetings?

23 (a) Completely satisfied
45 (b) Satisfied enough
10 (c) Somewhat unsatisfied
4 (d) Completely unsatisfied
58 (e) No opinion

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28. Why do you attend union meetings? (You can check more than one)

__8__ (a) I want to be more active in the union
__47__ (b) I want to know more about the union
__37__ (c) It's my responsibility as a member
__22__ (d) I have something to say or a problem
__15__ (e) Someone encourages me
_____ (f) Other (Please indicate) _____
_____

29. If you do **not** attend union meetings, why not?
(You can check more than one)

__12__ (a) I'm not interested
__0__ (b) I'm afraid my employer would find out
__22__ (c) I don't think my attending would change anything
__12__ (d) I don't have the energy
__42__ (e) I'm too busy looking after my family
__30__ (f) I'm too busy with other things
__39__ (g) Speaking English is hard
__31__ (h) Understanding English is hard
__29__ (i) Reading notices and meeting information is hard
__22__ (j) I don't know enough about the union
__14__ (k) I don't understand how union meetings are run
__8__ (l) I don't have transportation to meetings
__2__ (m) I have trouble finding parking at the union office
__9__ (n) Meetings after work are at a bad time for me
_____ (o) (Please indicate)_____
_____

30. Would you be interested in attending either workshops or training courses in any of the following?

__31__ (a) How the union works
__33__ (b) Reading and writing English
__15__ (c) Your collective agreement and how it is negotiated
__26__ (d) Health and Safety in the workplace
__44__ (e) Speaking and understanding English
__13__ (f) How union meetings work
__10__ (g) Preparation for writing the GED
__10__ (h) The role of Shop Stewards and Joint Council representatives
__25__ (i) None of the above
_____ (j) Other (Please indicate) _____
_____
_____

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31. Is there anything else that you would like to say about what makes it difficult for you to participate more in the union?

See Questionnaire Appendix "B"

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

PLEASE RETURN THIS TO YOUR SHOP STEWARD.

APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS BY FIRST LANGUAGE GROUP

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS BY FIRST LANGUAGE GROUP

Chinese	32
Tagalog	31
English	21*
Vietnamese	12
Portuguese	11
Italian	8
Punjabi	6
Ukrainian	5
German	5
Laotian	4
Korean	2
Aboriginal	2
Hindi	2
Hungarian	1
Slovak	1
Czech	1
Polish	1
Yugoslav	1
Turkish	1
Creole	1
Ilocano (Philippines)	1
Not identified	4

* Reflects higher response rate from this group rather than its percentage of union membership.